

PROFESSOR WILLIAM G. ALLEN. THE REAL JULIUS
MELBOURNE

In the course of one of those little, very interesting running debates, for which our Nation House of Representatives is noted, there occurred, during the Spring of April 12, 1904 an incident, both amusing and instructive between two leading Congressmen, yet like an electrical discharge on a starless night serving somewhat to intensify the surrounding gloom. The two Congressmen were Messrs. John Sharp Williams of Mississippi and Richard Bartholdt of Missouri, and the incident in question arose from a passage at arms between them over the well known anecdote about Thomas Jefferson and the Julius Melbourne dinner. The dinner at issue had reached some phase of the eternal race problem, when Mr. Bartholdt, fresh from the incident as retold in Pikkin's little work on the Achievements of the Blacks for which the late Gen. Gordon had kindly written the introduction, called by way of contrast with the South's present attitude toward colored people attention to Thomas Jefferson's entertainment of Julius Melbourne, a highly educated mulatto, at dinner with Chief Justice Marshall, William Wirt, and Elder John Beland of the Mammoth Cheese fame. The affair, declared to have taken place at Monticello in 1814, is told at great length and with much circumstantiality in a book called the Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourne, published about 1884 by Judge Jabez D. Hammond of Cherry Valley, N. Y. Jefferson is there introduced as having all these guests at dinner conversing and laughing in great glee, when by an incidental turn in the conversation the Negro question is brought up and each of the older guest gives his views which prove to be not at all favorable to the race under discussion. Jefferson now by another skillful tact introduces the young stranger informing his guest at the same time that though colored, he was a very accomplished and well-read scholar. This Jefferson dinner episode is only one of many such incidents in the splendid book which forms a most entrancing story from cover to cover; and coming as it did only a few years in advance, the Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourne was very appropriately considered a forerunner of Uncle Tom's Cabin. But the plain truth about the matter is the entire work is the purest piece of fiction. It was known to be such and so reviewed, at the time of its publication in 1847 while many of the supposed characters therein were still living. John C. Calhoun himself then still in his prime was there introduced to point the moral and adorn the tale. But neither of the participants in the debate knew this; which was allowable enough for Congressman Bartholdy, as he had come into the country after

"The battles, sieges, fortunes had been passed."
No such excuse can be found however for Congressman Williams. He was a native Southerner with no other mission than to prove by facts and figures that no man of his hue in that section had ever entertained or ever would entertain a colored man at his festive

board. Of course the Mississippian did doubt the truth of the incident, but his denial was like that of a man who should deny the presence of the sun on a hot August day simply because he wished to keep cool though the evidence in the case was all against him. His denial was based on his historic feelings, not upon historic facts. Mr. Williams was braver but no worse off than his numerous colleagues from his section. They all seemed perfectly content to let the matter pass as correct, illustrating in their own attitude that intellectually "man may be very poor, yet feel very blest." Jefferson's liberality of words at least, on the rights of the blacks were probably responsible for this attitude of nolo contendere; they certainly have caused others of that section to allow many things adduced for or against him relative to colored people to go unchallenged. But the part of this story which is most to our purpose here is that Julius Melbourn who by the way was a North Carolinian, was represented as having grown to manhood, - came into possession of the fortune left him by his foster mother, - married - had his wife sold away from him to the far South - regained her by a most wonderful escapade in after years - settled in western New York for awhile then finally left the country for England where he disappeared from American history. All these things took place before the year 1847 when the "Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn" was published, and as far as the author of the book was concerned had no more basis of fact than do the heroes of any other of the thousands of novels which appear yearly in print.

But even this most remarkable story found its exact counterpart in American history within five years of that time in the romantic case of Prof. William G. Allen. He too was Southern born came North to live - became educated - married - went through a great escapade for his wife - left the country and settled in England. Only the barest outline in facts concerning the earliest and the latest life of William G. Allen has come down to us but such were its romantic incidents and naturally dramatic settings that we need but strike the major chords at random and the melody will follow from the general theme.

William G. - (probably for William Gooch, a Virginian worthy and Governor of that colony for 20 years from 1727) - and Patrick Henry Allen were two brothers born at Fortress Monroe during the early years of the 19th century, but very little else is known of their origin. The boys appear to have been freeborn or very early set free by their father. Patrick the eldest like many other of the free blacks of that district enlisted in the navy and served through the Mexican War after which he married and came North to Boston where he lived till his death in 1867. William G. Allen, on the other hand settled at Troy, N. Y. where he came under the influence of the brilliant Henry Highland Garnet then fresh from Oneida Institute, and swaying all with his wonderful eloquence. Garnet both by example and word prevailed on Al-

Allen to aspire to prepare himself for a career of usefulness. Allen therefore entered Oneida Institute at Whitesboro, the alma mater of Garnet, and sat for four years at the feet of the immortal Periah Green, finishing there with the class of 1844. He remained for a while after graduation at Troy, N. Y. where he got into the Liberty party movement and the Smithsonian. He also assisted Henry Highland Garnet in editing the National Watchman there. His name appears also among the delegates to the great colored National convention held in Troy in October of 1847, although he did not seem to take a very important part in the proceedings. Allen made a trip into New England with Henry Bibb during the winter of the following year, in the interest of the Liberty party, and ended his tour by taking up residence in Boston at the suburban home of his brother then living in Chelsea. In Boston, the young student found Messrs. Jacob B. Allen and Robert Morris already rising young members of the Suffolk bar, at the very outset of their careers which proved a credit both to themselves and people. Mr. Morris had reached the bar through the office of Ellis Gray Loring, Esq., and William G. Allen took the position of clerk law student with Mr. Gray which Morris was then vacating for the practice of the legal profession.

This man Ellis Gray Loring was one of the biggest hearted men then to be found in New England. He was a life-long abolitionist, one of the "Immortal twelve" who with Garrison formed the first antislavery society here in 1831. With Wm. I. Bowditch, Samuel E. Sewall, and Richard H. Dana, he came generally to be considered a kind of a Committee on judiciary or the standing counsel for the underground Railroad. This Loring was as popular and as well liked in antislavery circles as his contemporary of well nigh the same name, Edward Greeley Loring who as United States Commissioner decreed Anthony Burns' return to slavery, was cordially hated. In truth Ellis Gray Loring, like his fellow-worker in the antislavery cause, Edmund Quincy was the best illustration possible of that high independence in forming an opinion, and an unswerving devotion to it regardless of consequences - even to the point of severing family ties - that can be found even in our independent New England. Not only were his time and his ample means constantly at the disposal of the cause of the slave, but even his private law office became in time a kind of a university for colored aspirants to the bar. Under the enlightened influence of this sterling patriot, William G. Allen was initiated into the mysteries of the law. Not only was the rich well stocked law library of Mr. Loring at the young student's service, but the other collection of books no less varied and welcome to the studious minded were among the invaluable treasures offered by this great philanthropist. Here Allen passed the years between 1843 and 1850, taking part in the public school fight and the antislavery meetings and delivering lectures on kindred subjects. Everything was antislavery in Boston at that time. From Liberty Party New York to Abolitionist Boston was like passing from the voltage

room to the dynamo itself. Ablaze of indignation greeted every southern aggression, and eloquence of the highest order was in abundance. We find William G. Allen in constant attendance at all these meetings either one of the speakers, or secretary, as at the Belknap St. Church when the anti-Obster meeting was held by the colored citizens denouncing the 7th of March speech.

On his opportunities in Mr. Loring's office William G. Allen drank deeply and he soon became generally known throughout the community by the scholarship evinced in his speeches and lectures. Both in Saxonville and Cambridge he was tendered a vote of thanks, and commended in resolutions to lectures bureaus, for his able address on the origin of literature and destiny of the African Race (Liberator Feb. 22, 1850). He in fact became so well known for his scholarly attainments that the trustees of the New York Central College offered him the chair of Greek, German and Rhetoric in the autumn of 1850, which position Mr. Allen accepted and entered upon the duties connected therewith about the beginning of 1851. At McGrawville, Prof. Allen as he was afterwards known, took high rank at once for his profound erudition as well as for his catholicity of taste. He succeeded Prof. Charles L. Reason, a most accomplished scholar, and teacher at that seat of learning, and suffered none in comparison with that great master of pedagogy. The new professor displayed great activity in the field of politics as well as in the beautiful academic grove at McGrawville. He took active part in forwarding Gerrit Smith's candidacy for Congress in the campaign of 1852, and wrote letters commending Horace Mann's course in Congress as well as condemning the colored people's attitude toward Kossuth. In addition to all these activities our young professor would occasionally deliver lectures on phases of the race question at points nearby McGrawville. It was at one of these towns, Fulton, N. Y., while delivering a lecture that Professor William G. Allen first met the beautiful Miss Mary E. King, the daughter of a local preacher.

at whose house he sojourned during his stay in the vicinity. In this incidental visit to the young lady's home the professor met both his fate and affinity, and showed at once more the truth of Marlowe's celebrated line which even the myriad minded Shakespeare thought worth appropriating:

"Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

Miss King was herself on the point of entering McGrawville, and returned with the professor thither at the end of his stay at Fulton. The young lady remained at McGrawville for a year and a half pursuing her academic course of instruction. Prof. Allen spent much time in her company; in fact tongues there soon began to wag about the attention of the two young people to each other. But as both of the interested parties were of age and the matter did not reach the point of interference with school discipline, the affair soon ceased to attract attention at the school. Not so with the neighboring outside world however which then kept a close watch on everything at the "Abolitionist, Amalgamationist" school. And things were not helped any by the one of two visits paid during vacation-time by Prof. Allen at the home of the young lady.

One of these visits paid in December 1852, developed a division of opinion in the family on the question of the young couple's marriage, the father and sister of the fiancée being willing while her stepmother and brothers bitterly opposed the union. Because of this state of feelings the young couple thought it best not to go any further in the matter at that time but to separate and wait developments. Prof. Allen therefore came over to Boston his old home and in company with William C. Nell made one or two lecturing tours to Salem, Danvers, Canton and other points not distant from Boston. Thus he remained in and around Boston till late in January, 1853 though not unmindful of the King family at Fulton, N. Y. Assuming that the opposition had blown over, or that at least it could not be very strong in a family where the members most concerned were on his side, Allen took the train from Boston for Fulton on the 29th of January, and was met at the station that same evening by the Rev. Mr. King in company

with his daughter. But because of the divided feeling in the household Prof. Allen did not stop with the Rev. Mr. King; but went instead to the home of Mr. John C. Porter an old McGrawville friend, and the teacher of the local school. The opposition of the step-mother and son had, however done its work in the community as Prof. Allen found out in a very short while.

Early in the afternoon on the following day (Sunday) while Prof. Allen, Miss King and the Porter family were negaged in a social converse a friendly runner arrived in advance of the mob warning both himself and Mr. Porter the teacher to flee to some place of safety, that the rabble was coming for the purpose of mobbing and probably of killing both men - Allen because of marrying the white woman - Porter, because he sheltered him. Such terrible news as this naturally caused great excitement in the Porter household. The two men began hastily to plan some means of safety, suggesting now one thing and now another, when lo at the fall of evening the mob, hooting, yelling and shouting all sorts of imprecations in the vilest language bore down upon the house. First the men appeared to be coming in small squads, next the streets seemed to be overflowed with men and finally the whole town seemed in motion for Porter's house. The mob was armed with tar, feathers, a rail and a barrel spiked with sharp nails. The first of which they intended to use upon Prof. Allen and roll him down hill to be spiked to death in the latter! On reaching the Porter house the mob sent forward a committee of the more respectable of their number to ascertain whether the wedding had taken place and if so to return with facts to the main body. The committee entered the house and finding that no wedding had taken place demanded that the young lady should go home in the sleigh that the mob had brought along, and that the professor leave the village forthwith. This being the only way for the professor to escape death, there was nothing else to do but go. The young lady's returning home without protest somewhat disarmed the mob leading them to believe that after all no marriage was probably intended. Taking advantage of the lull in their rage, and of the good effect that the pleas for peace by the leaders were producing the committee formed a hollow square around and conducted Allen

through the parted ranks of the mob to a place of safety. Thus was he protected somewhat from the fury of the rabble, but not wholly so; for many of them even then broke through and belabored him about the head and sides. While the whole crowd shelled and volloied him with the coarsest and vilest epithets from the two-legged arsenals that lined the entire way.

Allen was secreted away in a back room of the village hotel until the mob had somewhat dispersed. But even then they hung around in great numbers assailing him with vulgarity and abuse and trying to get into his place of hiding. But after remaining in the back rooms of the little hotel until the mob thinking he had gone had mainly dispersed he came out and by a circuitous dash in a sleigh though the town with the angry rabble in hot pursuit Allen finally made his escape to Syracuse some 25 miles away.

The newspapers were filled with the affair the next morning; many of them regretting that Allen was not killed outright and all of them distorting the facts in the case. One of the participants wrote up a coarse, somewhat heroic account of the affair, calling it the "Mary Rescue," in derision of the well known Jerry Rescue, the anniversary of which had just been celebrated in a great gathering at Syracuse only a short while before by the antislavery people. The young lady was prohibited from seeing any one outside of the members of her family. In fact she herself writing to Allen two weeks after the incident (American Prejudice against Color page 79) says: "I am a prisoner, yes, a prisoner; and when you write to me - if you should before I see you - you must say nothing but what you are willing to have seen." In truth the good people of Fulton talked themselves almost crazy over the affair: They dismissed Porter, the school teacher, summarily from his position for having had Allen at his house, and continued utterly loot to all other subjects until Gerrit Smith at the Liberty Party convention some four weeks afterward called them to their senses in a resolution as follows:

RESOLVED - That the recent outrage committed upon that accomplished and worthy man - Professor William G. Allen - and the general rejoicing throughout the country therein, evinces that the heart of the American people on the subject of slavery is utterly corrupt and almost past cure."

Meanwhile Prof. Allen remained in and around Syracuse until he and Miss Wing could arrange for the completion of their intention. In their case as have been in others before and since, they were to find out that

Love leads to present rapture - then to pain;

But all through Love in time is healed again;

and they further found what the good people of Fulton should have known before, that opposition no less than absence makes the heart

grow fonder? Soon after the mobbing the young lady dictated a letter declaring their engagement was off, on account of family opposition, and under the guise that this was final, got father's permission to visit Syracuse, to see and tell Allen in words which she could not use in a letter. The interview took place at the home of Rev. Jamy Loguen, himself afterwards Bishop of the A. M. E. Zion church. At this their first meeting after the Fulton tumult they pledged anew their love and concluded that now more than ever we would obey our heart's convictions though all the world should oppose," in short they "resolved to marry and flee the country." But all was not over yet. Some little strategem had still to be used. They arranged to carry on their correspondence through a third party, and under the pretence of final break, Miss King returned home and after a few days there left for Darlington a little town in Pennsylvania, some twenty five miles out from Philadelphia. There she went presumably to teach school. Prof. Allen hastened to get everything in readiness and wrote to tell her and to know if the plans were agreeable to which this is her reply:

Darlington, Pa. March 21, 185

Professor Allen)

Dearest and best-loved friend:-

I have just received your letter of March 13, and hasten to reply. You asked me if I can go with you in four weeks or thereabouts. in reply, I say yes: gladly and joyfully will I hasten with you to a land where unmolested, we can be happy in the consciousness of the love which we cherish for each other. While so far from you, I am sad, lonely, and unhappy; for I feel that I have no home but in the heart of him whom I love and no country until I reach one where the cruel and crushing hand of Republican America can no longer tear me from.

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Professor) I sometimes tremble when I think of the strong effort that would be put forth to keep me from you, should my brothers know our arrangements. But my determination is taken and my decision fixed; and should the public or my friends ever see fit to lay their hands upon me again, they will find that although they have but a weak defenceless woman to contend with, still that woman is one who will never passively yield her rights. They may mob me; yet, they may kill me; but they shall never crush me; Heaven's blessings upon all who sympathized with us. I am not discouraged. God will guide us and protect us.

Ever yours,

Mary.

With the most exquisite felicity she added by way of postscript these beautiful lines:

"Thou Friend, whose presence on my wintry heart
Fell like bright Spring upon some herbless plain;
How beautiful and calm and free thou wert
In thy young wisdom, when the mortal chain
Of custom thou didst burst and rend in twain,
And walked as free as night the clouds among".

What a beautiful mind that young lady must have had to write such a letter! Love certainly had not been occupying her mind to the exclusion of everything else at McGrawville! Surely exile and the loss of home and friends if ever supportable at all, would be agreeably so in the delightful companionship of such a sublimate soul! The only answer we have to this letter and the only answer worthy of such devotion was this:

"Married: IN New York City, March 30th, by Rev. Thomas Benson, Professor William G. Allen of McGrawville, N. Y., and Miss Mary E. King of Fulton, N. Y., daughter of the Rev. Lyndon King of Fulton.

The Allens went immediately to Boston after their wedding where they remained some eight or ten days; and thence they took for England reaching London in the wake of Mrs. Stowe and Uncle Tom's Cabin, and in time for the great May anniversary in 1853. The Central New York papers, especially the Syracuse Star and the Utica Gazette sent each a parting shot after Allen. The former moralized pathetically "Prof. Allen denied it and others thought that they had the most positive assurance from his statements that the amalgamation wedding was a fiction. x x x And in two short months the thing is consummated with all the formality of a religious observance, and this unholy amalgamation is perpetrated before high Heaven and asserted among men." While the other took up the strain thus: "Allen is said to be unworthy of and ashamed of his color, and has always said that when he married he would have a white girl. He was at one time at the Institute at Whitestown. x x His airs made him unpopular with his own people. Old abolitionists noticed and regretted his conduct at McGrawville." And indeed there was probably some basis of fact in this latter assertion if the memory of those who still recall the Professor be not treacherous. Allen himself assures us in the very first sentence of his little work detailing the mob story, that he was an octroon, a man with only one fourth Negro blood and three fourths Anglosaxon, and was not slow in reiterating this idea in some form on other occasions in his book. And if this his own statement be true he proves the Utica paper to be in error; he was seeking his own, not trying to shun them in forming the union that he did. But probably his own statements in the case were made rather for press, than for the erection of a genealogical

tree, and may not therefore be taken for more than their face value.

In England the young professor entered earnestly into the antislavery cause, much more so than he had ever done in his own country. He had several lectures such as: "The present aspect of the antislavery cause and the world's duty to the slave," and "The influence of great men in the history of a people", and subjects kindred to these; and he became very popular with the British public in each of them. In fact Prof. Allen became in time one of the main drawing cards of the British Antislavery people. He lived in one or two places other than London; and gave in addition to his lectures lessons in rhetoric and oratory of which he was a master. He was thus passing his residence in Dublin in 1857, and settled later in Liverpool where he applied himself to the same vocation. Allen continued his antislavery work up to the breaking out of the Civil War and the final passing of slavery, and with these he may be said to have passed out of American history. It is pleasant however to know that Allen at all times rose manfully to the high responsibility which his careless wooing in the Academic grove at McGrawville had imposed upon him.